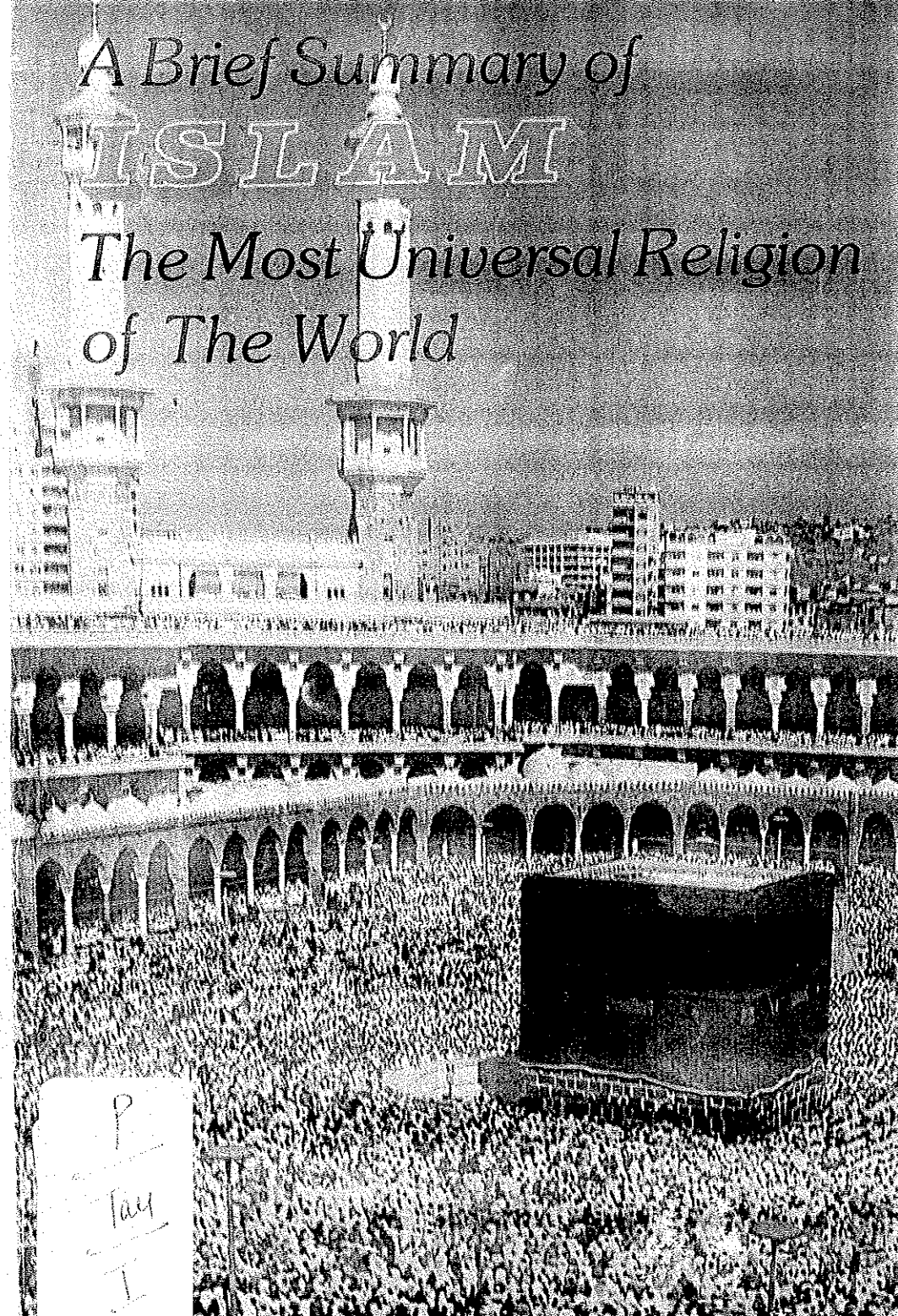


A Brief Summary of

ISLAM

The Most Universal Religion
of The World



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INDEX

1. When did the light of Islam begin to shine?
2. A glimpse of the life of the great prophet of Islam.
3. What every Muslim must believe in.
4. Islam : Social problems and human principles.
5. Government and civil laws in Islam.
6. The glorious religious rites of Muslims.
7. A living religion with exalted teachings.

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* **Author: Ayetullah Nasir Makarem**

* **Translated By: Dr. Mahmud Daavati**

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1—When did the light of Islam begin to shine?

As a result of falling away from the life-giving teachings brought by the prophets of God, the world had fallen into a deep and terrifying darkness. The ominous shadows of ignorance weighed heavily upon the people of that time.

Everywhere there was corruption and depravity. As a result of deviation of divine religions in the hands of man, signs of felicity and guidance had disappeared from different societies and confusion, consternation, hypocrisy, dispersion of superstitions and pernicious and false customs reigned everywhere. Arabia where the first ray of Islam shone, was drowned in depravity, corruption and decay from everywhere.

In this land one could smell blood¹. There was no law in Arabia. The only law of the people there consisted of 'habits and customs' which had been inherited from previous generations and that was nothing but 'superstitions' fantasies and ambitions².

In the heart of the peninsula, namely in Hejaz, the chief of each tribe was considered as a ruling king. And as a result of childish and sometimes stupid rivalries between tribes there was constant bloody warfare between them³.

Their wars resembled mostly pillage or savage revenge. Sometimes hatred was inherited from their forefathers. Most men were armed and fear and loss of security reigned everywhere⁴.

The great division in tribes and their remarkable scatterness as well as severe ignorance did not give the least opportunity for the development of reform ideas.

War and bloodshed among tribes was so great and extensive that it had completely paralyzed the daily life of the people of Hejaz. For this reason and of necessity they made an agreement to make peace during four months of the year to devote this time to commerce and providing for the needs of the whole year. These four months were called the 'forbidden months' and gradually became an established tradition. Therefore, the tribes spent two thirds of the year in fighting and only one third in peace and tranquility. Unfortunately, even this sacred tradition was broken repeatedly and the famous market of 'Okaz' which

1- The Holy Qur'an, ch. 62—Al Jumu'ah (congregation) verse 2

-Although they were before certainly in manifest error.

2- The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 53; Al Najm (The star) (verse 23)

They follow but conjecture and what (their) souls desire.

3- The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 4 The family of Imran (verse 102).

And remember Allah's favour to you when you were enemies then he united your hearts so by His favour you became brethren and you were on the brink of a bit of fire, then he saved you from it.

4- At that time their undergarment was 'fear' and their outward dress the 'swords' (Nahj al-balaghah, Sermon 87).

was the biggest site of their annual trading was converted to the site of a bloody war.¹ Also sometimes because of their own wish, the tribes would delay the period of truce in order to continue the wars.²

The channel of thought and life of the people in that environment was determined by superstitious astrologers and sooth sayers namely those who claimed to be in contact with evil and mysterious spirits, and have knowledge of future events hidden facts and the destiny of each individual. Even their great men and heads of tribes would take refuge with them in time of trouble.

Women had no value and personality in their society. Perhaps for this reason they could not participate actively in the most important chapter of their life, that is war and pillaging. Therefore women were deprived of most social rights and were dealt with like a commodity of low value. For example it was said 'He who does not carry a sword does not inherit' Rather, after the death of the father, the daughters were divided among the sons like the rest of the wealth left behind. Men would marry off their sisters (or in reality sold them) and take possession of their marriage portion. On the pretext that their small and innocent daughters may fall into enemy's hands during constant tribal wars and their hypocritical sense of preserving their honour be violated; they would bury them alive in a savage manner. Gradually this became a habit among certain people. And since women did not possess much social value in that social environment, no one protested against this action.

The birth of a daughter in a family was considered, a great calamity.³ Yet, it must not be forgotten that poverty, hunger and fear of the cost of living was another reason for their merciless killings.⁴

Drinking, adultery, gambling and telling stories and composing poems to prove their imaginary and sometimes funny and stupid honours were their most important pastimes. Each tried to present his tribe as the most outstanding group of people of the world. With this end in view sometimes they would take each other's hands and go to the cemetery where each would boast about the number of tombs of the members of his tribe to the other.⁵

1. The account of these wars which have become known in history as 'Fijar is recorded in many histories of Islam and the age of ignorance.' Bulugh al- Arab, vol. 1, P 266.

2. the Holy Qur'an Chapter 9. The Immunity - (verse 37) belief, whereby those who disbelieve are led astray. they allow it one year and forbid it (another) year.

3. The Holy Qur'an Chapter 16 Al Nahil (the bee) (verse 60- 61)
And when the birth of a daughter is announced to one of them, his face becomes black and he is full of wrath.

He hides himself from the people because of the evil of what is announced to him. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now surely evil is what they judge!

4. The Holy Qur'an - Chaptar 17-Bani Israeil: The Israelites (verse 24)
And kill not your children for fear of poverty— We provide for them and for you. Surely the killing of them is a great wrong.

5. The Holy Qur'an--Chapter 102-Al Takathur: The abundance of wealth, (verse 1--2)

Abundance diverts you. until you come to the graves.

Idolatry and mass of superstitions comprised their wellknown and widespread religion. The idols were the courtiers and close comrades of God¹ and the angels His daughters.² They would sacrifice to the idols and would demand the solution of all their difficulties from them. They would consult them in important matters and since the idols had no tongue, in order to discover their view they would seek the help of a special angury called 'Azlam'.³ Sometimes in order to gain victory they would drag these lifeless statues with great pain to the battlefield.⁴

Each tribe had its separate idol and sometimes did not officially recognize the god of another tribe and would not bow before him For this reason the Ka'ba, the most sacred religious center of Hejaz and a monument of the champion of Divine Unity, Abraham -- upon whom be peace - had turned into a house of idols full of splendor. They would perform the rites of worship and prayers to God in ridiculous manner by clapping and whistling extensively.⁵ A sizeable number of the Arabs of Hejaz (in Medina and its vicinity) were Christians and Jews to the extent that Christianity and Judaism were recognized as two official and current religions. Yet, following these two altered religions did not in any way bring about an improvement in the deplorable conditions of Arabian society

The only point of light in that dark and fearsome environment was the spirit of chivalry; freedom and courage added to generosity and hospitality which were among the characteristics of that nomadic people. Furthermore, they were heirs to one of the best and most perfect languages and literatures of the world which benefited from a poetic spirit and virgin and untouched natural sentiments.

But unfortunately because of lack of correct leadership the spirit of chivalry manifested itself in perpetual tribal wars and this exalted literature was employed only for making love or praising imaginary honours or occasionally composing poems appropriate for war and the battlefield.

Europe which was the most important part of the world of that time had just entered the middle ages which was the age of ignorance for that region. The age of ignorance of the Arabs came to an end with the appearance of Islam and the flowering of the dazzling and luminous Islamic civilization which under the guidance of the teachings of Muhammad (Peace be upon him) spread throughout the East. Yet, the age of ignorance of Europe (The middle ages)

1. The Holy Qur'an--Chapter 39 - Al - Zumar: The companies (verse 3)
We serve them only that they may bring us nearer to Allah.

2. The Holy Qur'an--Chapter 43 - Zukhruf: Gold (verse 19)
And they make the angels, who are the servants of the Beneficent females.

3. Azlam' were arrows upon which was written "do" and "do not"
They were placed in a bag and shaken. Then one of them would be pulled out and acted upon, as the 'view of the idols.

4. The battle of Uhud is a telling witness of this claim.
In this war the great idols 'Hubul' and 'Uzza' were drawn on camel back in front of the army (Histories of Islam)

5. The Holy Qur'an -- Chapter 8 Al-Anfal (voluntary gifts) — (verse 35)
And their prayer at the House is nothing but whistling and clapping of hands

continued for several centuries. During this period which lasted nearly a thousand years, ignorance, superstition and merciless crimes cast their ominous shadows over most of Europe. We believe that picture of the people of Europe during that period, as depicted by great western historians, including Will Durant and Albert Mallet in their works, make any kind of explanation on our part unnecessary.

If the Arabs of the age of ignorance buried their daughters alive, in Europe during the Middle Ages thousands of innocent people, the learned and the common people alike, were burned alive. The religious situation and innovations such as belief in the trine God, the sale of papers for the remitting of sins, and the exchange of thousands of sins with a small sum of money which had appeared on account of the perverted real Christianity were other signs of the darkness of these centuries. Social relations based on absolute rule of land owners and complete serfdom of the working class were much more oppressive and shameful than conditions in the ages of ignorance in Arabia.

In oriental countries also the situation from the point of view of thought, social relations, morals and customs was one of complete decay. Idolatry or worship before fire was very widespread and people considered the luxurious houses of idols and fire-temples as the most important centre of solution of difficulties of their life.

Remarkable distance between social classes and the usurption of the right of one class by another were to be seen in a lamentable fashion everywhere to the extent that in the time of Anushiravan whose justice is famous and proverbial differences between social classes in the great Iran of that day was such that reading and writing for the classes of labourers and peasants were considered as an impardonable sin.

This was a brief summary of the thoughts, beliefs, customs, habits and life in different societies at the time of the appearance of Islam. It was in this age of darkness and complete perplexity and decay that the sun of Islam began to shine and illuminate the world.

2—A glimpse of the life of the great prophet of Islam.

Muhammad - upon whom be blessings and peace - spent forty years of his life among such a people yet never adopted the colour of his environment.

He was born in Mecca in 571 (A.D.) His father, Abdollah, died before even seeing the fruit of his marriage with Aminah. At the age of six, Muhammad also lost his mother.

The young orphan was brought up under the guardianship of his grandfather and uncle among numerous difficulties. This situation left a special effect upon his pure and innocent soul and established a special relation to the end of his life between him and the oppressed and the deprived human society. At the age of twenty five married a lady who was a widow, a respected woman from a well known family of Mecca by the name of Khadijah who had become attracted infatuated with qualities of trustworthiness and capability in him.

It must be remembered that from the age of 25 to 50, that is, all of the period of youth and part of nature manhood, the prophet spent alone with this lady who possessed fidelity and self-sacrifice and who was fifteen years older than he. After her death while he was completely occupied with fierce battles with his enemies, he married several women from different tribes in order to gain the support of different Arab tribes and achieve his exalted good. For it was a

custom of the Arabs to consider the son-in-law as a member of their tribes and to defend him to their last breath like any other member of the tribe. It is of interest to note that most of the women the prophet married, were old and from this fact the real purpose of these marriages becomes clear.

While no more than forty years old, as he was occupied with praying to God and meditating upon the mysteries of creation in the mountain of Hira near Mecca, the angel of revelation descended upon him for the first time and recited to him the first Quranic verses. For three years he propagated his mission secretly and when he saw that the ground was prepared he declared his great religion openly with a penetrating and decisive logic. He rose officially for the reform of the people of the world.

Muhammad had never studied; in fact in that environment there were no sciences that one could learn from a teacher. Yet, through divine command he became the founder of many sciences in the world.

The pressure of the influential and oppressive chiefs of the tribes of Mecca who saw a termination of their rule in the appearance of the new religion forced Muhammad to migrate after thirteen years of struggle to the famous city of Yathrib which is over 400 kilometers from Mecca.

1 According to the most of Shia's historical books, few books quote she was unmarried

Later this city became known as **Medinat al Nabi**, the city of the Prophet. This migration opened a completely new chapter in Islamic history and for this reason has become the starting point of Islamic History. From there in a short period of time the voice of Muhammad was heard throughout the Arabian peninsula and in 11 A. H. (634 A. D.) when he died Islam had spread throughout Arabia. His followers, pursuing the same programme, continued their advance in the civilized world of that time with remarkable speed and today six hundred million people live under the banner of Islam.

3—What every Muslim must believe in.

The first question that presents itself in the teachings of Islam is Divine Unity and the Oneness of God (Tawhid). It can be said that in reality Islam has based all of its teachings upon this principle to the extent that it considers any deviation from this principle as an unforgivable act.¹

Therefore the phrase 'LA ILAHA ILLA Allah' 'There is no Divinity other than God' is the first and foremost motto and standard of Muslims. Furthermore, the Quran asserts that this phrase is the original motto and standard of all divinely revealed religions.² Islam condemns completely every form of polytheism and manifestations of idolatry which are signs of the period of man's ignorance and are an effective factory in the dispersion of human beings.

Islam has extended this spirit of "Unity and Oneness" from a call to the knowledge and worship of the Divine to every aspect of life. It considers all human society from every race, tribe and geographical location as members of one family and recalls that all Muslims are "Brothers" that is, the closest bond possible between two human beings.

For this reason Muslims usually call themselves brothers and the motto 'verily the believers are brothers' is one of the principle mottos of Islam, drawn from the Quran. And also it is with inspiration drawn from the spirit of 'Unity' that the Holy Quran instructs Muslims not to distinguish between the prophets of God and to have respect for all of them,³ because they all pursued the same God and all in their own time, performed the mission placed upon their shoulders successfully. Yet, it considers Islam as the most complete and the last of revealed religions and the prophet of Islam as the last and greatest ambassador of God.⁴ The Quran asserts that Islam is the last religion which all members of humanity have the duty to follow.

1—The Holy Qur'an Chapter 4-Al-Nisa—The women (verse 116)
Surely Allah forgives not setting up partners with Him.

2—The Holy Qur'an—Chapter 3-Al-i Imran. The family of Imran (verse 63)
Say: O' People of the book, come to an equitable word between us and you, that we shall serve none but Allah.

3—The Holy Qur'an—Chapter 2-Al-Baqarah: The cow (verse 285)
The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. They all believe in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers. We make no difference between any of His messengers.

4—The Holy Qur'an Ch. 33—Al-Ahzab: The allies (verse 40) Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets. (the word Khatam means a seal or the last part or portion of a thing)

Islam describes 'Allah', the unique God in this manner: He is aware of all the secrets of the earth and the heavens, all past and future events, and the acts and thoughts of his creatures¹ not a grain or minutest parts of the mysteries of the world of existence is hidden from His infinite knowledge² He has power over all things³ and before His infinite power all things are easy and facile⁴ Anything that He wills happens immediately⁵ Yet all of His acts are based on wisdom and measure⁶ He is not in need of anything⁷ and yet is compassionate towards all His creatures⁸ He is invisible⁹ and does not occupy particular place in heaven or earth¹⁰ Rather He is omnipresent and is nearer to us than ourselves¹¹ He has no like or equal, no progeny or wife and is completely free of these contingencies belonging especially to the world of matter¹² The prophets of God, even the prophet of Islam, Jesus and Moses are His chosen creatures¹³ and were human beings like others except that their spirit was so great, pure and capable that the revelation of God was sent to them and through this mysterious way, they were in contact with Him¹⁴ Islam believes that the goal of the prophetic mission of the prophet of Islam and other

1 --The Holy Qur'an Chapter 40--Al-Mumin: The Believer (verse 19) He knows the dishonesty of eyes and that which the breasts conceal.

2 --The Holy Qur'an--Chapter 3--Al-i Imran: The family of Imran (verse 5)

Surely nothing on the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allah.

3 --The Holy Qur'an--Chapter 2--Al Baqarah: The cow (verse 107)

Knowest thou not that Allah's is the kingdom of heaven and the earth and that besides Allah you have not any friend or helper.

4 --The Holy Qur'an--Nor is God to be frustrated by anything whatever in the Heaven or on the earth, for He is all-knowing, all-powerful.

5 -The Holy Qur'an--Ch. 36: Yasin (verse 82) His command, when He intends anything, is only to say it, Be, and it is.

6)--The Holy Qur'an--Chapter 4: Al--Nisa--The women (verse 11)

Allah is surely ever knowing, wise.

7 --The Holy Qur'an--Ch. 3--Al-i Imran: The family of Imran (verse 96)

Surely Allah is above need of the worlds.

8 - The Holy Qur'an -- Ch. 2--Al-Baqarah--the cow (verse 143) Surely Allah is compassionate, merciful to the people.

9 - The Holy Qur'an -- Ch. 6 Al-An'am--The cattle (verse 104)

Vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends all vision.

10- The Holy Qur'an -- Ch. 57--Al-Hadid--Iron (verse 4)

He is with you wherever you are.

11 - The Holy Qur'an -- Ch. 58. Qaf (verse 16)

We are nearer to him than his life - vein.

12 - The Holy Qur'an -- Ch. 112--Al--Ikhlas: The unity (verse 3)

He begets not, nor is He begotten (God has neither a son nor a wife) and none is like Him.

13 - The Holy Qur'an -- Ch. 35 - Al Fatir--the Originator (verse 32)

Then we have given the Book as inheritance to those whom we have chosen from among our servants.

14 - The Holy Qur'an - Ch. 18. Al-Kahf--the cave--(verse 110) I am only mortal like you -- it is revealed to me that your God is one God.

prophets is "education",¹ salvation from ignorance, infidelity and corruption love for the light of faith, knowledge, honesty and purity² washing the stains of enmity and grudge from human hearts, creating bonds of love between human beings,³ extending and spreading the principles of justice⁴ and finally breathing the spirit of humanity into individuals.⁵

Islam, unlike today's Christianity never asserts that someone has come in order to be sacrificed for our sins and punished for our wrong-doings so that we can escape punishment. Rather, it considers the goal of the movements begun by the prophets to be the principles mentioned above.

Another of the important principles of Islam is the belief in the Day of Judgement and the other world which is usually mentioned along with belief in 'Allah' the unique God.⁶ According to this principle, all people in this world, after death and termination of this life, return to another world and a new life which is a more complete stage of this life.

A detailed account is made of their good and evil acts. According to aptitudes gained in the light of their virtuous acts in this world they are rewarded or as result of defilement gained through evil acts they are punished.⁷ In the light of this principle Islam has awakened the sense of inner responsibility in all its followers.

Islam believes that no one is born in sin. Rather, everyone steps into this world with his pure primordial nature. God has pointed out the path of happiness to

1- The Holy Qur'an -- Ch. 62--Al - Jumu'ah: The congregation--(verse 2)

He it is who raised among the illiterates, a Messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His messages and purifies them and teaches them the Book.

2- The Holy Qur'an -- Ch. 14 Ibrahim: Abraham - (verse 1)

A Book which we have revealed to thee that thou mayest bring forth men, by their Lord's permission from darkness into light

3. The Holy Quran Ch. 8 - Al-Anfal: Voluntary gifts (verse 63)

He has united their hearts.

4. The Holy Quran Ch. 57-Al-Hadid Iron (Verse 25)

Certainly we sent Our messengers with clear arguments and set down with them the Book and the measure that men may conduct themselves with equity.

5. The Holy Quran Chapter 8 - Al - Anfal: Voluntary gifts (verse 24)

O. You who believe respond to Allah and His Messenger, when he calls you to that which gives you life.

6 In Chapter 2 (Baqara) of the Quran alone, in seven places belief in God and the Day of Judgement are mentioned together.

7 - In nearly every page of the Quran there is a discussion or reference to this important principle.

8--Present day Christians believe that all men are born sinful from the womb of their mothers and bear the weight of the sin of the first man. Through baptism their sins are forgiven. (The Holy Psalms. p. 257; and Great Religions of the world, p. 99)

everyone. It is man who chooses either the right or the wrong path.¹ Everyone is a pawn of his own actions and the happiness of each person depends upon himself.² No one is punished for the crimes of others³ and no one can forgive the sins of another except God.⁴

This was a summary of the beliefs of a Muslim. Muslims repeat these beliefs everyday in rites called the daily prayers 'Namaz. One of the notable aspects of these beliefs is their being free of every kind of doubt, complexity or incomprehensibility.

4—Islam: Social problems and human principles.

A - I - The revival of human values

Islam was born in an environment in which the personality of individuals in that environment revolved only around the axis of wealth, 'possession of many camels' multitude of gold and ornaments, and also belonging to a large and plundering tribe or well-known fathers or ancestors in the tribe. This was true to the extent that they criticized the prophet because he had become an orphan while still a child and did not consider his prophethood as acceptable because they believed he lacked sufficient personality.¹

Islam changed the criterion of the value of personality completely. It based the value of the human being in exalted thoughts and ideas, in having a pure soul and human virtues and in abstaining from sin and defilement.² In this way imaginary racial honours and the like were completely eliminated.³

For this reason after the rise of Islam oppressive wealthy men and merciless and hard-hearted chiefs of tribes who were among outstanding personalities of that day were completely removed from the social scene.

A group from the lower classes, even some of the former children of slaves who were competent, took their place and with their own innate capabilities reached the highest social positions. (Salman-e-Farsi who was a close friend and consultant of the prophet became the governor of Mada'in who during the time of the caliphs was at first only a poor slave, and there were many like him in Islamic history). This realism in the teachings of Islam caused the flowering and development of inner capabilities of individuals and brought into being outstanding personalities in science, politics and ethics in Islamic society and laid the ground for a major movement in human history.⁴

1 - Quran Chapter 43 - Zukhruf: Gold (verse 31)

And they say, Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns (the two towns referred to are Makkah and Taif).

2 - Qur'an Chapter 49 Al - Hujurat: The Apartments (verse 13)

Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you.

3 - Qur'an Chapter 49 - Hujurat: The Apartments (verse 13)

O mankind, surely we have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families, that you may know each other (superiority) of one over another in this vast brotherhood does not depend on nationality, wealth, or rank)

4 - Concerning further information about the dazzling greatness of Islamic civilization refer to the numerous works written by Christian and Muslim historians in this domain.

1 - The Holy Quran Chapter 76 Al-Insan : The man (Verse 3) We have truly shown him the way he may be thankful or unthankful.

2 - The Holy Quran Chapter 52. Al-Toor: The Mountain (verse 21) Every man is pledged for what he does.

3 Quran Chapter 6 Al-Anam: The cattle (verse 164) Nor does a bearer of burden bear the burden of another.

4 - Quran Chapter 3 - Ale - Imran: The family of Imran.(verse 134)

And who forgives sins but Allah ?

B - 2. Freedom and equality.

Another social and human principle which Islam presented to the world was freedom and equality. The prophet of Islam said: I have come to remove your bonds and chains¹ and to make you dear and proud. He said 'Oppression' to workers, overlooking the rights of women and removing the freedom of people are three great sins which will never be forgiven.² He affirmed this truth to his followers to be aware of the fact that God has created all of them free. They must seek not become slave of another³

Islam considered slave trade as one of the most evil acts⁴ and out lined an extensive and detailed programme for the gradual freedom of slaves, for the prophet knew if the order of their freedom were to be given immediately, many slaves who had no protection would be the danger of perdition. Furthermore, slavery lost its former meaning in Islam. The slave was a human being with all human rights and as it was said social conditions were created by Islam and the slaves reached the highest social ranks.

Based on these principles Islam became a vast refuge for the numerous masses of human society who were workers and labourers and who lived in the most painful condition. For this reason the first group to believe in the prophet belonged to this class of people to the extent that it became a cause of the strongest protest of the rich and the influential chiefs of tribes. But God affirmed the fact that the prophet should not heed their protest in the least degree⁵ Islam never allowed the interest of the majority

in society to be sacrificed for a limited number who held everything under their control.⁶ Islam pays particular attention to human freedom of thought and thus in many verses of the Quran invites men to 'mediate and think'

Equality in Islam is not in the sense of equality as in communist society for this latter is opposed to 'human freedom' which Islam supports. Rather, Islamic freedom is in the sense of the equality of all members of society and all classes, races colours in human rights and before all social, civil and criminal laws.⁷

1- Qur'an Chapter 7 - Al - A'raf: The Elevated Places (verse 157)

And removes from them their burden and the shackles which were on them.

2- There are three people who will never be forgiven: He who takes the rights of worker from him by force, he who does not pay the marriage portion of his wife and he who sells a free person into slavery.

3- 'Do not be a slave of another. God has created you free.

(Nahj - al - balaghah - among the last testaments of 'Ali to his children).

4- 'The worst of people are those who sell slaves.

5- Qur'an, Chapter 18 Al-kahf: the cave verse 28. And keep thyself with those who call on their Lord morning and evening desiring His good will, and let not thine eyes pass from them, desiring the beauties of the world's life. And follow not him whose heart We have made unmindful of Our remembrance, and he follows his low desires and his case exceeds due bounds.

6- If the majority of people are dissatisfied there is futile but with the satisfaction of the majority the dissatisfaction of the minority can be forgiven ... for the power of religion, the basic pillar of society and the reserve force before enemies is this very mass of people. Pay attention to their demands and let your heart be with them. (Nahj-al-balaghah - Command to Malik-e-Ashtar)

7- 'The arab has no advantage over the non - arab, nor the non - arab over the arab, nor the white skinned over the dark skinned, nor the dark skinned over the white skinned except in the light of piety (The Holy Prophet).

C-3 Sharing in the administration of social affairs:

Islam permits all its believers to participate in an equal manner in administering social affairs. The two important Islamic injunctions 'to order the right and prohibit the wrong' or 'invitation to accept the truth and opposition to corruption' is an example of this truth.¹ The prophet, although chosen by God, would consult people, in important social matters and allowed everyone to participate equally in this consultation.² It is interesting to note that the social injunctions of Islam in the Qur'an usually begin with the phrase 'Oh men' and 'Oh you who believe' and

this in itself is a living example of allowing all individuals to participate in social duties. For this reason the prophet of Islam has clearly asserted that social duties are the responsibilities of everyone³ and also he has said, 'He who does not concern himself with the improvement of Islamic society is not a Muslim.'⁴

D-4. Solving racial problems

Islam, through its exalted yet simple teachings, solved the great problem of race which has remained still unsolved in the world today. Also it must be realized that Islam carried out this programme among a people who had been racists.

E-5. Struggle against differences

Although Islam respects 'individual ownership' in order to preserve 'justice and freedom and encourage the development of economic activity, it has prevented in the severest terms the excessive amassing of wealth which causes differences in social classes. First of all Islam has forbidden every form of interest to the extent that it has called it a declaration of war against God.⁵ Secondly, through extensive laws of inheritance it has divided concentrated wealth more extensively among individuals and through the law of "KHUMS" which is a kind of Islamic "income tax" and the law of "ZAKAT" which is usually like tax upon one's wealth, Islam has sought to better the condition of lower social classes and fight against the amassing of wealth⁶ to the extent that it says "one poor person in an Islamic country is proof of lack of sense of responsibility of the wealthy people." Islam has completely banned hoarding and speculation and through encouragements (WAQF) and other means it has helped to increase "public wealth" which does not belong to a particular individual. Islam has given the greatest encouragement to its followers to pursue "Productive activities" such as agriculture, animal husbandry and all kinds of industries as well as trade and the leaders of Islam have taken initiative in many of these fields.

1 - He who does not practise "ordering that which is lawful and forbidding that which is unlawful" with his hand, heart and tongue is a dead man who only appears to be alive. (Nahj-al-balaghah - maxims of Ali)

2 - Quran Al-e-Imran : The Family of Imran verse 159 " And Consult them in important matters"

3 You are all the shepherds and guardians of the people and are responsible in this duty.' (The holy Prophet)

4- 'He who at the beginning of the day does not think about the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim' (The holy Prophet).

People do not become hungry, naked and destitute except through the sin of the wealthy' (Imam Jafar Sadiq A.S.)

5 - Quran Chapter 2 - Al Baqarah: The cow (verse 279)

If you do it not, take notice of war from God and His apostle.

6—Qur'an chapter 9—Al-Baraat: The immunity (verse 34)

Those who hoard up gold and silver, and spend it not in Allah's way announce to them a painful chastisement.

F.6 - Revival of the value of personality of women.

Islam has bestowed a great deal of personality upon women especially mothers to the extent that it considers humility before one's mother as the key to paradise! It has given women equal rights to men except in cases where differences in the natural Constitution of men and women necessitate differences and has made taking away the rights of women an unforgivable sin.

5—Government and civil laws in Islam.

Islam in contrast to many existing religions, does not limit the perspective to only a series of general moral and spiritual principles and religious rites. Rather it has taken into consideration every aspect of life and relations among men in all material and spiritual domains. It has established principles for human happiness in all these domains. For this reason there are extensive civil laws in Islam which can provide a reply to all the social and legal needs of man. But it must be remembered that the basis of all these laws is the principle of 'truth, justice and development under the banner of faith in God and with the preservation of moral principles.¹

Politically Islam is the founder of a system of world government based on the principle of justice and the preservation of the rights of all the creatures of God. For this reason geographic racial and class boundaries have no meaning in Islam at all. Rather Islam considers all men as members of one family and one body² While making this world wide call to accept this pure religion, Islam respects all revealed religions (even if they have later become deviated) Islam does not permit any imposition of beliefs or force³ or compulsion in religious questions.⁴ In its place Islam commands thought and deliberation and the acceptance of logic and reason.⁵ But before the religion of idolatry it shows no patience and condemns it in all its shapes and forms. In order to protect the independence of Islamic countries Islam commands every Muslim without exception to defend his borders in the time of danger and threat.

1 - The composition of thousands of books on Islamic jurisprudence, the subject of all of which is civil and criminal laws, methods of government in Islam etc. is a living witness to this claim.

2 - The faithful are all like members of one body (The Holy Prophet)

3 - In Islamic jurisprudence there is a chapter on 'The people of Zimmah' (people living under the protection of Islam in which the clear instructions of Islam concerning peaceful co-existence with all followers of divinely revealed religions except those who become enemies of Islam or betrayed it are described.

4 - Quran Chapter 2 Al- Baqarah: The cow (verse 256)

There is no compulsion in religion.

5 - Quran Chapter 34 - Al - Saba : (verse 46)

Say : I exhort you only to one thing, that you rise up for Allah's sake by twos and singly then ponder!

1 - Paradise is under the feet of mother (The Holy Prophet)

Martyrdom on this path is considered among the greatest of honours, Islam emphasizes the fact that all necessary preparations should be made and arms provided beforehand to prevent Muslims from being taken by surprise. Yet it is made clear that the purpose of preparing these arms and military equipment is not bloody wars or killing of human being but to 'scare' and 'push back' the enemy.¹ Therefore as soon as the enemy shows any real signs of desiring peace, Islam orders a ceasing of hostilities.² Furthermore, Islam commands that in case of war between Muslims and their enemies in the field of the battle the principles of humanity and chivalry must be respected.³ Islam has especially insisted on treating prisoners of war kindly.⁴

The main purpose of Islamic religious rites such as the five daily prayer, the fasting during the months of Ramazan and the pilgrimage (hajj) to the 'House of God' is to awaken men strengthen their spirit and increase human virtues and to prevent sin and deviation from the truth. In summary it is to make man become aware of God so that sometimes instead of all these phrases, they use the phrase 'nearness to God'.¹

These principles are observed in all Islamic forms of worship. In the glorious rites of Islamic worship the question of cleanliness, simplicity, aversion to material luxury and the elimination of social distinctions are completely observed. For example in the rite of the daily prayers even kings and presidents stand in one line with ordinary people, facing the God without the least distinction. In a short rite, full of meaning and melody they worship Him. In order to preserve the genuineness of these rites and also strengthen Islamic unity it has been commanded that everyone should perform these rites in a single language, namely Arabic which is the original language of the Qur'an and is one of the most complete languages of the world.

Furthermore, in the religious rites of Muslims special attention is paid to the group. The best form of daily prayers is one that is performed in group (Namaz-i-jamaat). In the Friday prayers which is performed on Friday, all Muslims who live in a city (within a radius of six kilometers) have the duty to assemble in one place and perform this rite together. Also in the great and unequalled annual gathering in the majestic rites of pilgrimage, every year more than a million people assemble in the original birthplace of Islam in Mecca and perform those magnificent and moving rites. In this great gathering the spirit of Muslim equality and brotherhood and also simplicity and removal of distinctions are to be seen more than anywhere else.

1 - Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power.... to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies and others besides whom you may not know but whom God does know

2 - Quran : Chapter 8 - Al - Anfal Voluntary gifts (verse 63) And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it.

3 - When the army of Muslims would prepare for the fields of holy war the prophet would say to them: Be careful not to betray, do not mutilate the body of the enemy after killing him, do not break your agreement, do not kill the old women and children, do not intrude upon those in monasteries, do not cut trees except when necessary,....and do not burn what has been cultivated, do not kill animals except when necessary for you and harmful to you never poison the drinking water of the enemy.

4 To feed the prisoners of war and to be benevolent to them is their definite right, even if there be a prisoner of war condemned to death who will be executed tomorrow. (Ali upon whom be peace)

1—The Holy Qur'an—Chapter 29 Al-Ankabut: The Spider (verse 45) Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil. The Holy Qur'an chapter 20—Taha (verse 14) Keep up prayer for my remembrance. "Daily prayers cause those who are pure and abstinent to draw close to God Spiritually" (The Holy Prophet).

7—A living religion with exalted teachings.

Shi'ism in the Contemporary world — Centres of Shi'ite learning — Genesis of Shi'ism. The Shi'ites and other Muslims of the world—Shi'ite beliefs — Distinctions of Shi'ism — Sources of Shi'ite religious instructions — Social and ethical duties.

Our purpose in this article is not to give a full and detailed presentation of Shi'ism and the condition of Shi'ites throughout the world, for this subject can only be treated justly through several books and studies. Rather our purpose is a short and condensed presentation, which is at the same time clear and explanatory, of Shi'ism and its followers for those not acquainted with the principles of our thought or those who have encountered deficient and malicious presentations. Since this article is being published in a major centre of Shi'ite learning it can provide the answer to many questions and problems that have arisen in this domain.

Shi'ism in the contemporary world

Today, according to the latest statistics there are more than one hundred and thirty million Shi'ites in different parts of the world. They are concentrated mostly in Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Syria, Jordan, the Yemen, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Turkey, Caucasia, Egypt and other Muslim countries of North and Central Africa.

From the quantitative point of view Shi'ism comprises about one fourth of the total Islamic community throughout the world. From the point of view of intellectual and scholarly activity a notable portion of the intellectual treasures of the Islamic world has been created by Shi'ite scholars. Yet, unfortunately still there are many people everywhere who are not acquainted with the principles of Shi'ite thought. Even our Sunni brothers who comprise three fourth of the Islamic community and in many lands live along side us are not completely informed of our method of thought and beliefs.

For those who live in the East this situation should not cause much surprise for 'agents of colonialism' who see the preservation of their interests in causing internal conflicts in this region have explored every avenue possible to cause hatred and division between these two groups of Muslims. In order to achieve this end they have even inverted the truth itself. Of course unworthy prejudices and the lack of the correct means of disseminating information and having extensive cultural exchange between the two groups of Muslims (Shi'ite and Sunni) has also helped in this matter.

As a consequence of this hatred and pessimism there have been occasional fights of a bloody nature between the two groups of Muslims, which have incurred nothing but loss upon the Islamic community. Yet, for those who had fixed their covetous eye on the extensive and vital resources of this vast region, such disputes were considered as a great victory. Fortunately as a result of the awakening of the East and the spread of means of communication as well as the disappearance of unworthy prejudices this situation has changed completely today.

This change is indicated by the fact that about 20 years ago on behalf of the professors and directors of al-Azhar University in Cairo, one of the leading centres of learning of the Sunni world, there was established a centre called "The centre for rapprochement between Islamic schools", with the collaboration of Shi'ite scholars. The aim of this centre as certified by its name is, to bring about familiarity and proximity

between the Muslims of the world to the extent possible. Its members are comprised of well-known Shi'ite and Sunni scholars and by chance the general secretary is an Iranian Shi'ite.

This centre publishes a learned journal called *Risalat as-Islam* in which scholars of both schools write articles based on sound proofs in order to illuminate the minds of the general Muslim public throughout the world. The late director of al-Azhar University and the 'Grand Mufti of the Sunnis, Shaikh Mahmud Shahtut, for the first time declared openly the official recognition of the religious teachings of the Shi'ite school. He permitted all Sunnis to perform their religious duties according to Shi'ite beliefs if they wish to do so. (Of course the back ground of this declaration had been prepared before by other scholars such as Shaikh Abdal Majid Salim). This declaration had a very good effect on the general Muslim public opinion and was very effective in creating mutual understanding between the two groups. Only a few fanatically minded people were disturbed by it.

Centres of Shi'ite learning

Shi'ism possesses several universities in different parts of the world where Islamic sciences can be studied. The most important among them are the centres of Najaf and Qum. Most of the outstanding leaders of Shi'ism come from these two centres and all of them are professors who teach in these universities. In these and other centres of learning there are numerous scholars, writers, propagators of the faith and preachers.

A relatively large number of students, about 10,000 are studying in Qum and Najaf. These students after terminating their studies are sent to different regions as directors of religious affairs or as religious preachers or if necessary they are called upon to become teachers and lecturers in the centres of learning.

An important segment of the scholarly and intellectual treasures of Islam has been written by Shi'ite scholars. Also according to reliable and trustworthy documents at hand all or most of the Islamic sciences have been founded by Shi'ite scholars, that is, they have been the first to create and establish these sciences. Shi'ite preachers are trained in such a way that contrary to other speakers they can deliver from memory and without any notes instructive, scientific and social lectures as well as warm and pleasing sermons, each exceeding one or two hours.

The late great leader and guide of the world of Shi'ism, Ayatollah Burujirdi showed much interest in making Shi'ism known to the whole world. He was certain that if the beliefs of Shi'ite Muslims were to be made known to the world in a correct way they would be rapidly accepted and people would find in them a shelter within which they could find solutions for the social and moral difficulties facing the modern world. Islam can provide an answer for the needs of the humanity of our age. For this reason he endeavoured to send propagators of Shi'ism to Europe and America. He sent an official representative and preacher to Washington and another to Germany. Unfortunately the possibilities did not permit any more than this. In West Germany in Hamburg (on the bank of the beautiful Alster lake) plans were made for a majestic mosque called "The mosque of Iranians".

This mosque which was the first Shi'ite religious building in the Western world has been constructed on a four thousand square metre plot and with heavy expenses. A large number of Muslims Shi'ite and Sunni alike — perform their religious rites in this mosque. Tourists visiting Hamburg come to see this beautiful and interesting mosque in which are combined Oriental and Occidental schools of art and architecture and where the Oriental and Islamic aspect is very obvious.

In Shi'ite universities especially those of Najaf Qum Meshed and Teheran there are large libraries most of whose books consist of works of Islamic scholars. It is also of interest to note that the great al-Azhar University of Cairo and the Islamic Qarawlyin University in Morocco, which are among the oldest universities in the world, were founded by Shi'ites the first by the Fatimid caliph and the second by the Idrisid sultans.

The genesis of Shi'ism

Occasionally, certain people, because of misinformation or intention make it appear as if Shi'ism is something other than the religion brought by Muhammad. Upon whom be blessings and peace the great leader of the Islamic world, and that Shi'ism came into being in later centuries. The truth is that Shi'ism is nothing but Islam and Shi'ites consider as unworthy and without authority anything that has the least conflict with the religion of the Prophet of Islam — (upon whom be blessings and peace) and the Quran.

The Quran, according to Shi'ism, is the most important-untouched source of Islam which has reached us without any change from the Prophet. For this reason the Quran is made the criterion and means of judgement of the authenticity or falsehood of sayings. Which have been taught to us from the great leaders of religion, the means to judge between authentic sayings and those that are forged. Any saying that has been handed down, if it accords with Quran is acceptable and if not rejected. Taking these truths into view, there is no need to remind people that Shi'ism begins with the first instance when the revelation descended upon the Prophet of Islam.

The Shi'ites and other Muslims of the World —

What distinguishes the Shi'ites from other Muslims? The answer to this question is clear. The first point that distinguishes the Shi'ites from Sunnis is the question of succession to the Prophet. Shi'ism believes that the position of succession and vicegerency (caliphate) of the Prophet is a sacred and responsible function which like that of prophecy itself must be designated by God. A person who occupies this station is called the Imam. Shi'ism believes that after the Prophet there were twelve people who were one after another his true successors and vice-gerents. The first of them is Ali ibn Abi Talib (upon whom be peace). Ali was the cousin and son in law of the Prophet and according to the confession of the scholars of Islam, the most learned, self-sacrificing and courageous of the companions of the Prophet. He was the first man to accept the faith and never separated from the prophet throughout his life.

During the last year of his life the Prophet, while returning from pilgrimage to Medina in a place called Ghadir khumm, officially designated 'Ali' as his successor before a large gathering of Muslims. Before this event also he had referred several times to this matter. Furthermore, the intellectual, spiritual and religious distinctions of 'Ali' were such that there was no one more worthy of becoming the successor of the Prophet than he. However, after the death of the Prophet, political and tribal competition prevented him from becoming officially the caliph and leader of Muslims. But after 26 years and the caliphate of three other men, Muslims turned to him again and selected him as their leader.

Without doubt the period of rule and caliphate of 'Ali' which was unfortunately short having lasted about five years and which terminated with his martyrdom, was the most perfect and exalted example of just and truthful government and fight against all unjust inequalities. This is a matter which no historian can deny. Today his meaningful and wise sayings have survived and make known his school. The Shi'ites of the world boast in having such a leader. Even the word *Shia* which etymologically means "partisan" or "followers" has come into being through the fact that the members of this group are the partisans of such a leader.

Shi'ites believe that after 'Ali, eleven of his descendants became consecutively the successors and vice-gerents of the Prophet and with 'Ali himself comprise the *Twelve Imams*. Their names are as follows: 1. Ali ibn Abi Talib. 2. Hasan ibn 'Ali 3. Husain ibn 'Ali 4. Ali ibn al-Husain 5. Muhammed ibn 'Ali 6. Jafar ibn Muhammad 7. Musa ibn Jafar 8. Ali ibn Musa 9. Muhammad ibn 'Ali 10. Ali ibn Muhammad 11. Hasan ibn 'Ali 12. Muhammad ibn al-Hasan. A large number of works in the Islamic sciences have survived from the pen of these Imams.

Shi'ism believes that the earth can never be without the special representatives of God (the prophets and their vice-gerents). They have been ordered to guide, lead and train the people of the world and continue to do so. For this reason they believe that the Twelfth Imam is right now alive and endowed with a long life in the same way that Christians and many Muslims consider Christ to be alive. This matter is neither beyond the power of God which all religious people believe in, nor against the principles of modern biology for science has not determined an absolute maximum for human life.

Shi'ites like all Muslims believe that finally a day will come when mankind will reach an impasse because of injustice, struggles, wars and bloodsheds. Then with a sacred spiritual revolution guided by one of the descendants of the prophet the face of the world will change completely. Peace, justice and faith in God will dominate everywhere and all peoples and nations will live in a lasting peace and tranquility. Only Shi'ism believes that the leader of this revolution will be none other than the Twelfth Imam.

Shi'ite beliefs

Shi'ism believes that religion is not only a series of stale commands or ceremonial regulations which man performs at particular hours or days of the week. Rather, it believes religion to be comprised of a series of exalted instructions and beliefs and a group of life giving regulations and laws which are intertwined with man's individual and social life. The aim of religion is to provide felicity for man in all aspects of life.

The basis of Shi'ite beliefs like those of other Muslims, is three fold.

(I) Divine Unity

Shi'ism believes God to be one without any associate or like or progeny. Shi'ism violently opposes to every form of polytheism and deviation from Unity and also to all anthropomorphic humanism and idol worship. It believes that God is the creator of the whole universe of existence and therefore holds that throughout the universe nothing is created but for a benefit or purpose.

Shi'ism believes that God is neither body nor matter. Rather, He is above all that is material and therefore has no specific place or location. He is everywhere and has knowledge of all things. He is closer to us than ourselves. He sees everything and hears every sound but His Vision and Hearing are not as in our case with eyes and ears.

The near and remote past and future are alike for Him — and all things are known and evident in His knowledge. He has even knowledge of thoughts that pass through our minds. He is one in every way and does not consist of parts. Even His Qualities, such as His power and knowledge, are identical with His Pure essence. His Being has no beginning or end. It is pre-eternal and post-eternal. (He exists from eternity to eternity). He is in every way *Absolute Being*. His Qualities do not resemble the qualities of the creatures for these are in every way limited whereas He is in every way unlimited. Only He can forgive the sins of His creatures No one, not even the Prophet and the Imams, can intercede for anyone except with His permission.

(II) — The sending of Prophets —

Shi'ism believes that God in order to guide His creatures and lead them from the darkness of ignorance and misery to the light of knowledge and happiness, has sent a number of Prophets, for God has created man for felicity and happiness and has created the means for the attainment of its end in his own existence and of the universe itself. Sending Prophets is also with the purpose of perfecting this goal. That is why teachings of the Prophet and the divine laws are also the complements of the order and organization of the world of creation. Any law which is opposed to the primordial nature of man is surely not revealed by God.

Shi'ism believes that the aim of the prophets has never been to propagate unintelligible matters such as the endurance of every kind of disagreeable situation and torture or sacrifice for the sins of others. Rather, their aim has been that same correct instruction and training, the strengthening of moral principles and the relation between men, and the establishment of the principle of justice among mankind. The Quran in many verses has clearly reminded man of this truth.

Shi'ism respects all prophets of God without exception but believes that as a result of the passage of time their holy books have become mixed with all kinds of superstitions and have suffered various forms of deviation. A living witness of this fact is the unjust and childish qualities mentioned in these books about God and His prophets.

Shi'ism considers the Prophet of Islam — (upon whom be blessing and peace) as the greatest and last Prophet of God. It also believes that all the prophets and Imams are exempt from every kind of sin and fault and are inerrant. They have never committed a sin and will never do.

(III) — The day of resurrection

Shi'ism like all Muslims believes that in a determined time all men will be resurrected and in another world which is everlasting and eternal will receive the reward or punishment of their good or evil works. The least good or evil action is accounted for and its account is preserved by God. No one will be treated with injustice or oppression. Those who have performed good works shall go to eternal paradise in which is found every kind of spiritual and corporeal blessing and evil doers will be sent to the inferno.

Distinctions of Shi'ism

Shi'ism shares the three above — mentioned principles with other Muslims but there are two points which distinguish it from others: 1 — Belief in the Twelve Imams who are the vice-gerents of the Prophet and whose account has already been given.

2 — Belief in Divine justice. By this is meant that Shi'ism believes that God never deals with injustice or oppression towards His creatures, for injustice and oppression towards others is a sign of either ignorance or lack of power whereas God is omniscient and omnipotent. As a consequence of this principle Shi'ism also believes that all men possess the freedom of Will. No one is forced to obey or rebel. The destiny of each person is in his own hands. No one bears the weight of the sins of others nor is anyone punished for the wrong doings of others.

Some of our Sunni brothers believe otherwise. They assert that justice and injustice have no meaning when applied to God. Whatever God does is precisely justice and no one has the right to debate this matter. They do not consider man as being free in his acts and possessed to free-will. Rather, they hold the principle of determinism. We do not agree with these beliefs.

Sources of Shi'ite religious instructions

Shi'ism has received its religious instructions which concern all aspects of private and social life from the closest source of knowledge to the Prophet, that is the household of the Prophet (the Twelve Imams) who have received their knowledge either directly or through intermediaries from the Prophet himself. In its method Shi'ism relies on a completely authenticated saying of the Prophet which all Muslims remember from him: "I am departing from you but I leave among you two precious things: the Quran, the Book of God, and my household who will never separate from each other"

In order to discern and distinguish religious obligations Shi'ism follows, in addition to the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams, that which meets the consensus or the (learned man) and also that which reason can judge with certainty. These four principles (the Quran, traditions of the Prophet and Imams, consensus of the (ulema) and reason are called the four — fold proofs, Shi'ism believes that it is a duty of religious scholars to investigate these sources and deduce the religious obligations and instructions of Islam from them. In contrast to Sunnism, Shi'ism holds that this right

is not limited to a determined number of individuals but all religious scholars have the right to investigate the sources of the religious injunctions and to deduce the obligations and instructions of Islam from them. Or one could say that the gate of "ijtihad" (giving judgement and opinion on religious matters) is open to all the "ulema"

In the principles of Islamic injunctions and laws there is no difference of opinion between Shi'ite and Sunni scholars. The only difference of view is in certain aspects of the details of problems. Shi'ism holds that Islam is an everlasting religion which is at the same time easy to accept and can be followed by everyone at all times and in all places. Shi'ite scholars have collected the individual and social duties and instructions of Islam in detail in books called the "Books of jurisprudence" (fiqh) and have created numerous sciences for the refinement and examination of these injunctions.

Social and ethical duties

Shi'ism believes that a true and conscientious Muslim is one who does not forget God under any condition, who is truthful, trustworthy upright and friendly, who is aware of the condition of his brother Muslims and does not refuse any kind of help to them (One must remember that Muslims address each other as brothers and this is the closest relation that exists between two human beings on the basis of mutual respect and equality. In this matter they have been inspired by the Quran that has said, "All Muslims are brethren"). No racial, class or family distinction can cause one person to become superior to another. The only distinction is what pertains to piety and chastity therefore, from our point of view every form of racial discrimination is rejected. Shi'ism possesses extensive teachings concerning rights which it has received from the Imams. Even the animals have rights. To molest them without reason is condemned. On the contrary they should be protected. Shi'ism asserts that no one should stop striving in order to earn a livelihood and that no one should become a burden upon society. At the same time striving to have a better life should not disregard moral principles and virtue.

Shi'ism prohibits alcoholic beverages, narcotics, pork, gambling, sexual promiscuity and usury and its like. It considers the principle of cooperation as the most important basis of social life and the first duty of a Muslim toward others. Like other Muslims, Shi'ites consider human life as particularly significant so that for murder, blood-shed and injury upon others heavy penalty have been foreseen in Islamic penal codes. Also special rights and much importance are held for the family, the upbringing of children, kindness towards relatives, even distant ones and neighbours.

Like other Muslims, Shi'ites are permitted to have more than one wife (up to four) but not only in this matter non-obligatory but has heavy conditions imposed upon it. Taking these conditions into consideration, only in case one's wife cannot bear children or perform the marital act or if a woman does not have someone to look after her and is in need to such care or in similar cases, does multiple marriage take place.

Contrary to what many westerners think the number of men in Islamic countries having more than one wife does not exceed one percent. It is obvious that this polygamy under stringent conditions is much better and more virtuous than illicit and unconditional sexual relations of many western men with a large number of women.

Shi'ism believes that all Muslims should participate in all social and political problems that pertain to them and should pursue these problems with awareness. It is opposed to solitary life, retirement from the world and monasticism.